

TOWN MANAGER

Fiscal Year 2012

One of the many important issues confronting me and the Town this year occurred outside of work, when I was forced to miss several weeks of work in September and October recuperating from injuries sustained in an accidental slip and fall in my neighborhood. I would be remiss not thanking again so many for the support and encouragement I received from members of the community, the Select Board, staff, and my family. Town staff at all levels performed exceedingly well in my absence. While not a surprise to me, it was a demonstration again of the tremendous skill, dedication, and work ethic each and every Town employee brings to their everyday work in our collective efforts to be leaders in everything we do. This is a source of tremendous pride to me as their Town Manager. I particularly want to recognize the steady and responsive leadership as Acting Town Manager provided by Planning and Development Director Dave Ziomek and that of Assistant to the Town Manager Debra Roussel in my absence.

Below are some key highlights over the past year, fully cognizant of the fact that many of these would not have been achieved without the skill and dedication of the Town staff. As the Town and region emerge from the protracted recession, I believe the positive momentum is palpable and reflected in a number of exciting initiatives:

- ◆ Recruitment of two additional outstanding professionals, Building Commissioner Rob Morra and Human Resources Director Deb Radway, to join the Town of Amherst team;
- ◆ The operating and capital budget articles adopted at the Annual Town Meeting in May maintained current service levels after four years of belt-tightening;
- ◆ In March, Standard & Poor's reaffirmed the Town's strong and stable AA bond rating. A higher bond rating leads to lower interest rates on debt that the Town issues;
- ◆ Creation of the Emily Dickinson Historic District is a far-reaching protection for the historic character of the Town;
- ◆ Residential Parking Design Standards were approved decisively by Town Meeting, a small, but significant step forward in our Safe & Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative;
- ◆ A new After School Program Partnership by the Town and the Amherst Public Schools, funded in part with funds approved by Town Meeting, will begin in September 2012 at all three Amherst elementary schools. The primary goal for this partnership is to strengthen and enhance the strong programming currently in place, not replace it;
- ◆ Resurfacing of 10 miles of badly deteriorated Town roadways in 2011 while also incorporating pedestrian, cyclist, and public transportation improvements;
- ◆ Rehabilitation and reopening for the 2012 summer of the War Memorial Pool at Community Field with the help of a \$208,000 state PARC grant and a unanimous vote for funding by Town Meeting;
- ◆ Election as chair of the PVRTA Advisory Board, a position from which I work even more closely with our regional partners and the Five Colleges to preserve and strengthen our public transportation network;

- ◆ The downtown Business Improvement District, following acceptance by property owners in the district and the approval of the Select Board, was launched in 2012 to supplement Town services focused on marketing, beautification, special events planning, and parking to solidify Amherst's standing as one of the best college towns in America;
- ◆ Applied for designation as a "Green Community" in May, with the prospect of access to state grants for energy efficiency and conservation for initiatives such as LED streetlights. The Commonwealth designated Amherst as a Green Community later that summer;
- ◆ Town Meeting approval of my proposal to start a bold and ambitious tree planting plan to plant 2,000 trees in the next three years to beautify our community and reduce pollution;
- ◆ The Amherst and Pelham Select Boards and the Regional School Committee approved my recommendation to transfer all eligible retired teachers and their dependents from the Commonwealth's GIC health and life insurance plans to the local Amherst-Pelham Health Claims Trust plans. The change is projected to reduce costs for both employers and nearly all retirees;
- ◆ This year, Town staff at all levels and our partners in the community and at UMass continued development of our Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative to improve quality of life in neighborhoods across Amherst. We strengthened a collaboration to strategically plan for the student celebrations that typically accompany the warm weather. Late April weekends, typically filled with large parties that disrupt neighbors, were quieter than usual;
- ◆ In October, the Select Board approved a Sewer Extension Master Plan that recommended that the neighborhoods in the Harkness Road and Wildflower Drive areas should have sewer mains extended into them as soon as practicable, endorsed my recommendation to pay for sewer extensions from sewer fees charged to all customers consistent with the Town's past practice, and Town Meeting passed a \$4.2 million bond issue.

Respectfully submitted,

John Musante
Town Manager